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Message Text

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USMISSION USBERLIN
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
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TAGS: PINT, GW
SUBJECT: THE 1976 BUNDESTAG ELECTION: SOME IMPRESSIONS

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BEGIN SUMMARY: THE 1976 BUNDESTAG ELECTION CAMPAIGN IS

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COMING TO AN END MUCH TO THE RELIEF OF THE CANDIDATES, THEIR EXHAUSTED STAFFS AND THE MAN IN THE STREET WHO HAS BEEN BOMBARDED WITH ELECTION PROPAGANDA. WE HAVE FOLLOWED THE MAJOR CANDIDATES ACROSS THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC, CAREENED DOWN AUTOBAHNS WITH THEM AT UNREASONABLE SPEEDS AND HAVE LISTENED TO ENDLESS REPETITIONS OF THEIR BASIC POLITICAL SPEECH. THERE FOLLOW SOME OF OUR IMPRESSIONS OF THE CAMPAIGN WHICH WE HOPE WILL PROVIDE BACKGROUND FOR WHAT HAPPENS ON OCTOBER 3. END SUMMARY.

1. THE COMPACT SIZE OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC PERMITS NATIONAL POLITICIANS TO COVER THE WHOLE COUNTRY VIA RAIL, CAR, HELICOPTER, AS WELL AS BY JET. ALTHOUGH KEY GERMAN CANDIDATES MAINTAIN A BRUTAL SCHEDULE, THEY ARE NOT PLAGUED, AS THEIR AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS ARE, BY SUCH PROBLEMS AS JET-LAG, TIME CHANGES, CONFLICTING MEDIA DEADLINE TIMES, ETC.

2. IT IS A TESTIMONY TO GERMAN PROSPERITY AS WELL AS LIBERAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION SUBSIDIES THAT BOTH THE MAJOR PARTIES HAVE UTILIZED SPECIAL ELECTION TRAINS (AT A COST OF $12,000 PER DAY). IN FACT, 1976 WAS THE FIRST TIME THE OPPOSITION, AND NOT JUST THE PARTY IN POWER, COULD AFFORD THE USE OF A SPECIAL TRAIN. THE SO-CALLED "SONDERZUG" PROVIDES A MOBILE COMMAND POST FOR THE CANDIDATE, A PLACE TO EAT AND SLEEP FOR HIM AND HIS ENTOURAGE, AND AN INFORMAL MEETING GROUND FOR THE CANDIDATES AND THE PRESS. BOTH KOHL AND SCHMIDT OFTEN REMAIN IN THE DINING CAR WITH THE PRESS UNTIL THE SMALL HOURS OF THE MORNING.

3. GIVEN THE CONTRAST IN THE PERSONALITIES OF SCHMIDT AND KOHL, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THEIR APPROACH TO CAMPAIGNING DIFFERS CONSIDERABLY. WHILE KOHL IS NOT THE ENTHUSIASTIC CAMPAIGNER THAT SOME AMERICAN POLITICIANS ARE, HE IS, BY GERMAN STANDARDS, A "HAPPY WARRIOR." HE ENJOYS PLUNGING INTO THE CROWDS TO PRESS THE FLESH AND HE IS TURNED ON BY THE RESPONSE HE GETS FROM THE CROWDS.

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4. HIS PERSONALITY, HOWEVER, IS MORE COMPLEX THAN THAT OF "MR. NICE GUY FROM MAINZ." HE IS, IN FACT, A VERY PRIVATE PERSON AND A MAN WHO IS CAUTIOUS IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS. HIS BEHAVIOR IS SO CONVENTIONAL AS TO MAKE HIM RATHER COLORLESS. WHEN AS AMERICAN NEWS MAGAZINE RECENTLY DID A COVER STORY ON THE FRG, THE REPORTERS COULD NOT IN INTERVIEWING HIS STAFF AND FRIENDS DIG UP A SINGLE HUMOROUS OR HUMAN INTEREST ANECDOTE FROM HIS

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PAST. ONE JOURNALIST, WHO ATTENDED A GRADUATE SEMINAR WITH HIM, REMEMBERS KOHL AS A STUDENT WHO NEVER EXPRESSED HIS VIEWS IN CLASS. DESPITE HIS SELF-RESTRAINT, WHEN THINGS GO WRONG WHILE ELECTIONEERING, HE DOES LOSE HIS TEMPER.

5. KOHL BELIEVES IN THE OLD-FASHIONED VIRTUES HE EX-POUNDS AND, MOREOVER, HE BELIEVES MOST GERMANS SHARE THESE VIRTUES. WHILE HE WILL NEVER GO DOWN IN HISTORY AS A GREAT ORATOR, HIS RATHER ARTLESS, SINCERE STYLE ALMOST ALWAYS ELICITS AN ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE FROM THE AUDIENCE. HE IS SENSITIVE TO THE CHARGE THAT HE IS PRO-VINCIAL AND SCORNED BY INTELLECTUALS, BUT HE IS CONFIDENT THAT HIS MESSAGE STRIKES A RESPONSIVE CHORD IN THIS BASICALLY CONSERVATIVE NATION.

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6. CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT ON THE OTHER HAND LOOKS UPON CAM-
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PAIGNING AS A CHORE ALTHOUGH HE TOO CAN BECOME ANIMATED WHEN HE HAS A RESPONSIVE AUDIENCE. HE IS AN EXCELLENT ORATOR WHO CAN BEGUILE AN AUDIENCE WITH THE BEST OF THEM. HE CAN BE WITTY, SARCASTIC, TOUGH AND EVEN TENDER WHEN HE WANTS. AT THE END OF HIS SPEECH IN WHICH HE ATTACKS THE OPPOSITION UNMERCIFULLY, HE WILL CLOSE SPEAK-ING SOFTLY, REMINDING THE AUDIENCE THAT THEY SHOULD VOTE WITH THEIR HEARTS AS WELL AS THEIR HEADS...AND THAT THE HEART LIES A LITTLE BIT TO THE LEFT.

7. THE CHANCELLOR LIKES TO HAVE A FEW HECKLERS IN THE CROWD BECAUSE IT PROVIDES HIM WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE SPD IS ANTI-COMMUNIST (TROJAN PONIES, HE CALLS THEM) AND BECAUSE HE ENJOYS INTELLECTUAL CONFRONTATION. HE HAS NO COMPUNCTIONS, HOWEVER, IF THE HECKLERS SERIOUSLY DISTURB THE MEETING, TO HAVE THEM THROWN OUT.

8. EVEN FOR A MAN FROM HAMBURG, SCHMIDT IS DISTANT AND COOL. IT TOOK A LOT OF PRODDING FROM HIS ADVISORS TO GET HIM TO SHAKE A FEW HANDS AND TO STOP AND WAVE TO THE CROWD WHEN HE LEAVES HIS CAR. SCHMIDT, UNLIKE KOHL, WHO OFTEN RIDES ON THE PRESS BUS TO AND FROM THE RR STA-TION, ALWAYS TRAVELS BY CAR AND ENTERS ANY MEETING BY THE SHORTEST ROUTE RATHER THAN TO MINGLE WITH CROWDS. BOTH CANDIDATES OFTEN RECEIVE FLOWERS FROM MIDDLE-AGED HOUSEWIVES IN THE CROWDS BUT NEITHER SEEMS TO HAVE THE EMOTIONAL APPEAL OF WILLY BRANDT.

9. WHILE GERMAN POLITICIANS ARE TRADITIONALLY MORE ALOOF THAN THEIR AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS, SCHMIDT'S RE-

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SERVE GOES BEYOND THE GERMAN NORM. FOR EXAMPLE, AT A CAMPAIGN PARTY IN HIS ELECTION DISTRICT, AN OCCASION WHERE HE WAS TO APPEAR FOR THE LAST TIME BEFORE OCTOBER 3, SCHMIDT DID NOT ENTER INTO THE FESTIVITIES AT ALL. HE GAVE A BRIEF AND HUMOROUS SPEECH BUT THEN SAT WOODENLY AT THE HEAD TABLE. OCCASIONALLY AN AUTOGRAPH HUNTER WOULD TENTATIVELY APPROACH HIM BUT AFTER A WHILE HIS BODYGUARDS (TWO POLICEMEN FROM HAMBURG WHO ARE SPD MEMBERS) TURNED THEM AWAY. A FEW PEOPLE HELD BRIEF CONVERSATIONS ABOUT LOCAL PROBLEMS AND AFTER A DECENT
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INTERVAL HE AND LOKI LEFT THE PARTY.

10. IT IS NOT THAT SCHMIDT CANNOT BE CHARMING; HE CAN. BUT HE ESPECIALLY ENJOYS SUBSTANTIVE CONVERSATIONS, IN PARTICULAR THOSE COVERING INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND ECONOMICS. ON THE "SONDERZUG," FOR EXAMPLE, HE PREFERRED TO SIT AND TALK WITH AMERICAN AND BRITISH JOURNALISTS ABOUT FOREIGN POLICY AND THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC SITUATION THAN TO TALK WITH THE GERMAN JOURNALISTS ABOUT THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

11. THE SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS SURROUNDING SCHMIDT AND KOHL ARE LAX, AT LEAST COMPARED TO US STANDARDS. BODYGUARDS ACCOMPANY BOTH CANDIDATES, BUT ACCESS TO THE CANDIDATES IS RELATIVELY EASY EVEN FOR UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS. AT THE SCHMIDT RALLIES, ALL SORTS OF PEOPLE WORK THEIR WAY TO THE PODIUM. ACCORDING TO SOME GERMAN REPORTERS, SECURITY MEASURES HAVE BEEN RELAXED IN THIS CAMPAIGN COMPARED TO THE 1972 BUNDESTAG ELECTION AND VARIOUS LAND ELECTIONS SINCE THEN.

12. ALL CANDIDATES HAVE A BASIC SPEECH WHICH THEY ALTER SLIGHTLY, IN TIME AND EMPHASIS, DEPENDING ON THE AUDIENCE. GERMAN AUDIENCES HAVE A LOT MORE PATIENCE THAN AMERICANS AND THEY WILL SIT STILL FOR A ONE AND A HALF HOUR SPEECH WITHOUT COMPLAINT. ONE POLITICIAN CLAIMS THAT ANY SPEECH UNDER AN HOUR IS JUST NOT A SERIOUS SPEECH. KOHL, GENSCHER AND OTHERS HAVE THUS OBVIOUSLY BEEN PLAGUED WITH VOICE PROBLEMS. KOHL AND BUNDESTAG DEPUTY WALLMANN, FOR EXAMPLE, RECEIVE A SHOT FROM A DOCTOR, OR THEIR VOICES WOULD GIVE OUT. GENSCHER'S VOCAL CORDS GAVE OUT COMPLETELY AT A RALLY LAST WEEK, LEADING TO REPORTS THAT HE HAD SUFFERED A STROKE.

13. SCHMIDT PREFERS INDOOR MEETINGS, BECAUSE HE BELIEVES THE CROWDS ARE LESS DISTRACTED AND RESPOND MORE READILY. KOHLAWLARHIS SPEECH STYLE--MORE GENERAL AND SHORTER

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THAN SCHMIDT'S. GENSCHER AND HIS FELLOW-FDP CANDIDATES
GET SMALLER AUDIENCES, BUT CLAIM TO PREFER THAT BECAUSE

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IT PERMITS INTELLECTUAL EXCHANGES.

14. THE WIVES OF THE TWO PRINCIPAL CANDIDATES PARTICIPATE IN THE CAMPAIGN BUT ALMOST ENTIRELY IN THE ROLE OF THE FAITHFUL HELPMATE. LOKI SCHMIDT DOES DO SOME TOURING ON HER OWN, TO OLD FOLKS' HOMES, MARKETS, ETC., BUT NEITHER WIFE GIVES SPEECHES. INTERVIEWS ARE KEPT AT THE LEVEL OF OLD-FASHIONED WOMEN-MAGAZINE JOURNALISM AND THE PRIVACY OF THE CANDIDATES IS HONORED TO A DEGREE WHICH WOULD BE ENVIED BY AMERICAN OFFICE SEEKERS.

15. THE LIBERALS' CAMPAIGN CENTERED AROUND THE FOUR FDP MINISTERS REFLECTS THE SHORTAGE OF FUNDS AND THE GENERAL DISORGANIZATION WHICH SEEMS TO BE A HALLMARK OF THE FDP. GENSCHER HAS BEEN TRAVELING AROUND THE COUNTRYSIDE FROM MEETING TO MEETING TO INSPIRE THE LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS. A TYPICAL LIBERAL RALLY HAS A SMALL CROWD WHICH INCLUDES A LOT OF BEARDED YOUNG MEN AND LONG-HAIRED GIRLS, MOSTLY IN JEANS. IN FACT, THERE IS A STRIKING SIMILARITY BETWEEN A LIBERAL RALLY AND A MCGOVERN RALLY DURING THE U.S. PRIMARY CAMPAIGNS OF 1972.

16. "STRAUSS BLEIBT STRAUSS:" FRANZ JOSEF STRAUSS STILL POLARIZES OPINION IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC. THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS DEVOTE MORE TIME TO ATTACKING FRANZ JOSEF STRAUSS THAN THEY DO ON ANY OTHER SUBJECT. WHILE HE IS GETTING OLD AND PERHAPS EVEN HEAVIER, HE CONTINUES TO BE A MASTER ORATOR AND HE DRAWS LARGE CROWDS WHEREVER HE APPEARS, IN NORTH AS WELL AS SOUTH GERMANY.

17. BEYOND THE SUPERSTARS OF GERMAN POLITICS THERE ARE THE 3244 LOCAL BUNDESTAG CANDIDATES SLOGGING AWAY AT THE GRASS-ROOTS LEVEL. THE CANDIDATES HAVE TAKEN OVER MANY AMERICAN TECHNIQUES, TRAVELING FROM VILLAGE TO VILLAGE WITH A LOUD-SPEAKER TRUCK, SETTING UP SHOP AND GIVING A BRIEF TALK, AND THEN HEADING ON TO THE NEXT STOP. IN THE RURAL AREAS PEOPLE COME OUT AND LEAN ON THEIR FENCES TO HEAR, IN THE APARTMENT COMPLEXES THEY COME OUT ON THE BALCONIES OR STICK THEIR HEADS OUT OF THE WINDOWS. KIDS FLOCK AROUND THE CANDIDATES FOR FREE BALLOONS, POSTCARDS

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AND AUTOGRAPHS.

18. TIME AND AGAIN EMBASSY OFFICERS COVERING THE ELEC-
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TION HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY THE EMPHASIS IN THE FRG CAM-
PAIGN THIS YEAR ON PUBLIC-RELATIONS GIMMICKS LONG-
FAMILIAR TO THE U.S. ELECTION SCENE. POSTERS PORTRAYING
SMILING, DYNAMIC CANDIDATES ABOUND. (A STRAUSS AIDE
INFORMED US, HOWEVER, THAT THE CSU ELECTED TO STRESS
SLOGANS AND NAMES RATHER THAN CANDIDATE PICTURES IN THE
EARLY DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN, BECAUSE THE CSU CANDIDATES
FOR THE MOST PART LACK POLITICAL SEX APPEAL.)

19. TO GAIN AN IMPRESSION OF PRESSING ISSUES IN THE
RUHR IN THE WAKE OF THE BIEDENKOPF BLITZ CAMPAIGN
AGAINST SPD UNION TIES THERE, ONE EMBASSY OFFICER ACCOM-
PANIED SPD DEPUTY URBANIAK DURING A TWELVE-HOUR WARD
SWING ABOUT HIS DORTMUND DISTRICT LAST SATURDAY. AMIDST
A PLETHORA OF BALLOONS, AUTOGRAPH-SIGNINGS, BEER AND
WURST STANDS, CAKE AND COFFEE SESSIONS, AND GOOD-OLD
HANDSHAKING, THE CANDIDATE FOCUSED HIS GUNS ON STRAUSS'
ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT WITH LOCKHEED PAYOFFS, THE IMPORTANCE
OF A SECOND BALLOT VOTE FOR HELMUT SCHMIDT, AND THE
ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE SPD GOVERNMENT. IT SEEMED CLEAR
FROM THE SYMPATHETIC HEARING HE RECEIVED THAT THE LOCAL
PARTY EFFORT THERE IS IN GOOD SHAPE AND THAT THE SOCIAL
DEMOCRATS WILL AGAIN DO WELL IN THEIR NORTH RHINE-
WESTPHALIA STRONGHOLDS THOUGH NOT, PERHAPS, QUITE AS
WELL AS IN THE PAST.
HILLENBRAND

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